

## National / International

## Chertoff cites limits on mass-transit security

States and cities should bear most of the cost, he said, while Homeland Security focuses on larger threats.

By Lara Jakes Jordan  
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WASHINGTON — The government must focus on preventing airline hijackings and other terror threats that could inflict mass casualties, and is limited in the help it can give cities and states to protect trains and buses, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said yesterday.

His comments, in an Associated Press interview, drew criticism from Senate Democrats from metropolitan areas who said mass transit systems are highly vulnerable to attacks — as shown in last week's bombings of three subway lines and a bus in London.

With finite resources and a wide range of threats, Chertoff said the federal government is forced to set priorities to prevent attacks that would produce the highest number of casualties. In the interview with AP reporters and editors, he noted that mass transit systems are largely regulated

by state and local authorities that he said should provide the bulk of security measures.

By contrast, he said, the commercial aviation system is "almost exclusively a federal responsibility" and demands extensive funding.

"The truth of the matter is, a fully loaded airplane with jet fuel, a commercial airliner, has the capacity to kill 3,000 people," Chertoff said. "A bomb in a subway car may kill 30 people. When you start to think about your priorities, you're going to think about making sure you don't have a catastrophic thing first."

He added: "But it doesn't mean that we only focus on aviation. It means we do aviation, we do other things as well, but we scale our response based on the nature of the architecture."

The remarks touched off criticism among Democrats as the Senate approved, 96-1, a \$31.8 billion Homeland Security Department spending measure for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

As part of the bill, senators rejected

a plan to spend \$1.16 billion on mass-transit security measures, favoring instead a competing \$200 million proposal. The bill now goes to a conference committee to resolve differences with the House version passed in May.



**Michael Chertoff** says his agency must focus on the most lethal scenarios.

The Senate also unanimously passed a resolution introduced by Sen. Jon Corzine (D., N.J.) that calls for federal standards to protect the country's chemical plants from attacks. He also has introduced a bill to beef up security at chemical plants.

Responding to Chertoff's comments in the interview, Sen. Charles E. Schumer (D., N.Y.) said the statements "just make one's jaw drop," and he demanded an apology.

Corzine, who has described Chertoff as a friend, said he hoped the secretary would reconsider whether "funding for rail and transit security is a lower priority for the federal government."

"It certainly isn't a lower priority on

the terrorists' minds," Corzine said. "It wasn't in Madrid. It wasn't in Moscow. And certainly and unfortunately was not in London most recently."

Confronted later in the day at a Senate Homeland Security Committee hearing, Chertoff sought to clarify his remarks by saying the government has "an equal responsibility to protect Americans across the board."

Still, he said, "we have to be partners with everybody but we have to recognize there are differences in the way we apply our partnership."

Earlier, the Senate rejected the \$1.16 billion plan by Sen. Richard C. Shelby (R., Ala.) to improve security on mass transit. Shelby has long pushed for costly upgrades in security for subways, buses and trains. For example, high-tech detection systems to sniff out explosives or nuclear, biological or chemical weapons of mass destruction come with an estimated \$6 billion price tag in the nation's 30 largest metropolitan areas.

Shelby's plan would have pushed

the budget beyond its limits, said Sen. Judd Gregg (R., N.H.), who was overseeing the spending bill.

The wide-ranging bill would pay for the hiring of 1,000 more Border Patrol agents, provide nearly \$1 billion for countermeasures to biological weapons, and eliminate a White House proposal to raise ticket fees for airline passengers by \$3 to help finance other security programs.



**Sen. Jon Corzine** says mass transit "isn't a lower priority on the terrorists' minds."

Also yesterday, the Transportation Department announced that Jeffrey Runge would resign as the administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to take

a new post overseeing bioterrorism policy at the Homeland Security Department.

Runge, 49, a former emergency-room physician from Charlotte, N.C., has held his current job since August 2001. As chief medical officer at Homeland Security, he would coordinate responses to any biological attacks.